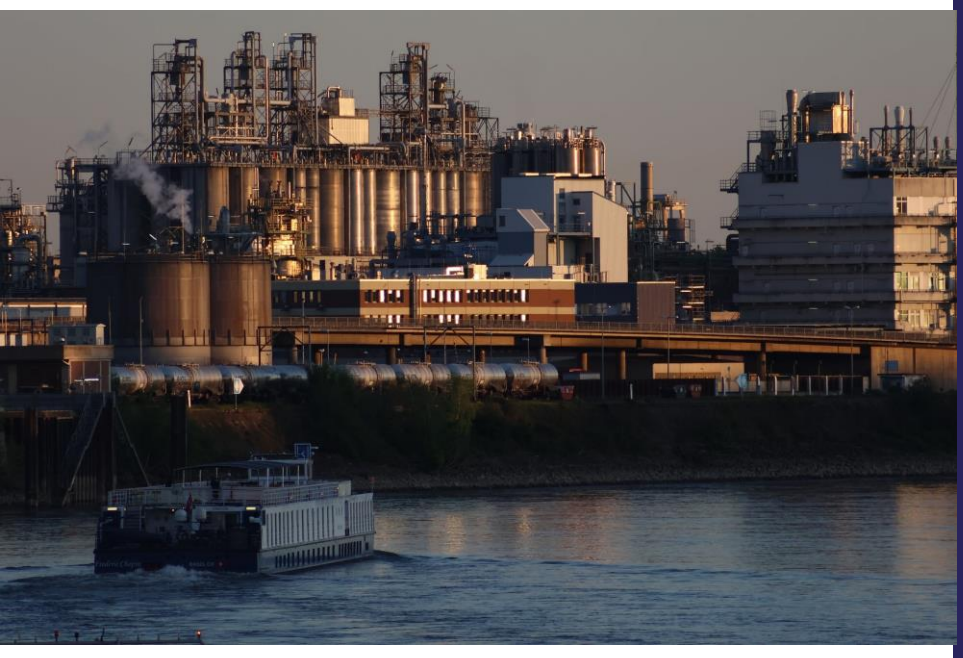
EurEau recommendations for the partial revision of REACH

Modernising rules while improving the protection of our water resources.



REACH is the EU's main legislation for regulating chemicals and protecting human health and the environment. EurEau supports the modernisation and simplification of REACH through targeted amendments to the REACH Annexes, rather than a full legislative revision. The amendments should strengthen chemical regulation and deliver the commitments of the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability and the Zero Pollution Action Plan.

Chemical pollution must be addressed at the source, instead of relying on ever more complex water treatment to protect public health and the environment.

Key messages

- *Prevent pollution at source:* Strengthen the identification and regulation of hazardous substances, particularly persistent, mobile and toxic (PMT), very persistent and very mobile (vPvM) and endocrine-disrupting substances, to better protect drinking water resources and aquatic ecosystems.
- *Drive substitution and faster restrictions:* Maintain a strong Authorisation Procedure, accelerate restrictions on substances of very high concern and introduce a prompt, far-reaching PFAS ban covering products manufactured both inside and outside the EU. Restricting consumer uses alone will not address the scale of PFAS pollution.
- *Strengthen the evidence and regulatory framework:* Improve chemical registration and testing requirements, introduce Mixture Assessment Factors to address the combined effects of chemicals, and ensure consistency between REACH and EU water legislation.

1. Introduction

What is REACH?

The Regulation on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) is the main piece of European legislation to protect human health and the environment from the risks that can be posed by chemicals. This is done by requiring information on the intrinsic properties of chemical substances and their uses, evaluating their hazards and risks and by taking measures, such as setting phase out dates for substances of very high concern and restricting production, placing on the market and use. REACH also aims to enhance innovation and the competitiveness of the EU industry.

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What are the drawbacks of the current REACH regulation in protecting water and the environment?

Undoubtedly, the implementation of REACH increased our knowledge on chemicals and improved the protection of public health. However, the current REACH regulatory framework has significant drawbacks when it comes to the protection of water and the environment:

- ~ It heavily relies on industry data, which is often incomplete, as the "No Data, No Market" principle is not enforced.
- ~ It lacks information requirements for endocrine disruptive chemicals (EDC) which hamper the identification of EDCs according to the new classification criteria in CLP.
- ~ Enforcement inconsistencies across EU Member States mean that non-compliant chemical imports (especially through online sales) frequently enter the Internal Market and bypass environmental safeguards.
- ~ REACH failed to regulate highly persistent "forever chemicals" (PFAS) and certain groups of similar hazardous substances that threaten water resources, such as Persistent, Mobile, and Toxic (PMT) or very Persistent and very Mobile (vPvM) substances. One of the main reasons is the exemption of polymers from registration and evaluation.
- ~ The combined effect of multiple chemicals ("cocktail effect") is not assessed, and;
- ~ The process for identifying, authorising, and restricting Substances of Very High Concern (SVHCs) is notoriously slow and bureaucratic. Consequently, the substitution drive of REACH is weakened, it hampers the transition to the circular economy and many hazardous chemicals continue to pollute the environment during prolonged evaluation periods.

Current state of play

REACH has been in place since 2007. When setting out a far-reaching agenda with the 2019 European Green Deal, the European Commission presented ambitious goals relating to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, to energy, the circular economy and pollution prevention. As part of the latter ambition, the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability was adopted in 2020. It announced important steps such as the transition towards a sustainable-and-safe-by-design approach to chemicals innovation, the phasing out of the most harmful substances by extending the use of the generic risk approach, the introduction of a mixture assessment factor and the introduction of new hazard criteria. REACH and CLP should be reinforced to achieve these objectives given that these regulations form the cornerstone of EU chemicals legislation. A targeted revision of REACH was announced to modernise the legislative framework, strengthen human health and environmental protection, and support frontrunner companies. In 2021, the Commission re-confirmed their ambition by publishing the Zero-Pollution Action Plan. The plan set out the vision towards a pollution-free Europe in 2050, with intermediate goals in 2030.

While the targeted revision of REACH had been in development and delayed for years, the Commission officially backed away from it in April 2026. It stated that the legislation would

not be opened to prioritise certainty and predictability for industry. Instead, the Commission would table targeted technical amendments and strengthen enforcement using the comitology procedure. Article 131 (REACH) provides the legal basis to amend the Annexes via the procedure of Article 133(4). Changes will therefore remain limited to 'non-essential elements' of the Act, thus limiting the scope of required changes.

EurEau reaction to this decision

EurEau believes that a full revision would have offered the opportunity to modernise REACH while maintaining consistency and strengthening the protection of our water resources.

However, given the current political climate, such a full revision might have led to a weakening of its key provisions. We therefore support the Commission's decision to limit the revision to changes that can be agreed through comitology. At the same time, we call on the Commission to use this revision to fully implement the measures announced in the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability[1] and the Zero Pollution Action Plan[2].

A modernised REACH must strengthen the substitution drive to phase-out substances of very high concern by identifying and classifying them in the registration process, leading to upstream prohibitions, substitution and the shift towards non-toxic materials. This should ensure a better protection of our drinking water resources, public health and the environment.

2. EurEau proposals to overcome REACH drawbacks

EurEau supports efforts to modernise and simplify REACH. However**, this must not go to the detriment of health and environmental protection.** On the contrary, the REACH Annexes should be revised in a way that strengthens hazard identification, improves information requirements to close current data gaps, and better integrates REACH with EU water and waste legislation. The REACH Annexes should enable the following:

1. Protection of public health, water resilience and the circular economy

Access to safe and affordable water and sanitation services is a human right. Well-functioning and resilient water services are the foundations for a competitive European economy. This is why the European Union sees water service providers as critical entities[3] and essential to maintain vital societal functions[4].

However, as the Water Resilience Strategy points out, "highly persistent pollutants, such as PFAS, keep accumulating across EU waters …". In addition to the health impacts that amount to €52-84 billion annually, the Strategy states that "the economic cost of cleaning PFAS contamination in Europe has been estimated to range from € 5 to 100 billion a year"[5].

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0667&qid=1766153333937.
[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0400&qid=1623311742827.
[3] Directive 2022/2557 on the resilience of critical entities.
[4] Preparedness Union strategy.
[5] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-water-resilience-strategy_en.

The Strategy also highlights that "water and marine pollution, including from microplastics, must be tackled at source or across pathways in line with the Zero Pollution Action Plan". REACH has a crucial role to play in this context. Putting the burden of de-contamination on the shoulders of water service providers will substantially reduce their capacity to support resilient, circular and energy efficient societies.

This applies to drinking water service providers but also wastewater operators. REACH must support them by improving not only the quality of drinking water resources, but also that of the wastewater effluent and sewage sludge to protect aquatic life and support resource recovery. In order to enable the circular economy and resource recovery of textiles, paper and plastics, REACH should restrict the use of substances similar to PFAS.

2. Protection of drinking water resources

REACH was successful in reducing water pollution from a number of hazardous substances. However, drinking water suppliers increasingly find new substances (emerging pollutants) in their water resources. In particular, persistent and mobile substances are causing problems. Their intrinsic properties mean that:

- they will end up in our water bodies,
- they are difficult to remove in drinking water treatment.

REACH must ensure that our drinking water resources are protected from harmful chemicals by improved regulation and implementation.

3. Recognition of PMT and vPvM substances as SVHC

REACH should apply the criteria given in the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation and define persistent, mobile and toxic (PMT), and very persistent, very mobile (vPvM) substances as substances of very high concern (SVHC) with the aim to phase them out, as their intrinsic properties pose serious long-term risks for the quality of drinking water resources and the aquatic life.

4. Strengthening of substitution and Authorisation

EurEau disagrees with the Commission's intention to reduce the use of the Authorisation Procedure, as the clear sunset dates drive innovation and substitution by phasing out SVHCs. It is particularly important for substances used widely in products in the society as it leads to diffuse emissions and contamination of SVHC in our waters. If the Commission decides to maintain this choice, the phase-out aim needs to be explicitly incorporated in all regulatory tools (including all restrictions).

5. Use the Generic Risk Assessment and fast-track restrictions

In line with article 191.2 of the TFEU, any sustainable chemicals strategy must start from control-at-source measures and apply the Precautionary Principle.

EurEau supports an increased use of the Generic Risk Assessment (GRA) for all of the most harmful chemical substances and their degradation products so that they are efficiently regulated according to the intrinsic hazards they pose.

REACH explicitly considers the risks posed by indirect exposure of humans via the environment through consumption of food, drinking water and inhalation of air, which are influenced by releases of substances into the environmental compartments of air, water and soil. We advocate for an adjustment of the risk characterisation, so that it also comprises consideration of the substance in the waste and recycling phase effecting e.g. water quality – especially if relevant to drinking water resources - and on the possibility to achieve the goals of the WFD and the Drinking Water Directive (DWD).

6. Facilitation of PFAS and other group restrictions

Most PFAS are persistent and mobile, while others are bioaccumulative. They therefore represent a massive threat to water services and Europe's water resilience in general. Due to their exorbitant societal costs, complex technical issues including for waste management, the lack of appropriate treatment technologies for wastewater treatment (scalability, effectiveness, energy and climate impacts), and the burden we put on future generations, **EurEau strongly advocates in favour of a prompt and far-reaching PFAS ban for products made inside and outside the EU[6].** Any transition periods towards this goal must be strictly limited to essential societal uses and be time limited. Only addressing consumer uses will not solve the PFAS crises but only a minor part of the pollution.

The group restriction proposal, currently prepared by ECHA (UPFAS) is the only feasible way to regulate thousands of substances with similar concerns in parallel and to avoid regrettable substitutions, as we witness not only with PFAS, but also with bisphenols. In addition to this, PFAS use in biocides and pesticides must be banned quickly.

This becomes even more urgent when looking at rising PFAS concentrations in the environment, including in drinking water resources. At the same time, the Commission is likely to propose a DWD revision leading to significantly lower PFAS limit values for drinking water.

7. Introduction of Mixture Assessment Factors (MAF)

EurEau supports the application of Mixture Assessment Factors (MAF). The revision of the REACH annexes should provide the framework to achieve this.

8. Achieve full policy consistency between REACH and the substances covered by the Environmental Quality Standards Directive (and Groundwater Directive).

Substances covered by the Environmental Quality Standards Directive and the Groundwater Directive, should automatically be prioritised for Authorisation and Restrictions in REACH.

[6] See also EurEau | PFAS phase out a pre-requisite for a water resilient Europe.

3. EurEau proposals for changes to the REACH Annexes

The following table identifies the key annexes that should be amended and the changes that would support measures to overcome the identified drawbacks of REACH.

Table 1: Proposed amendments to the REACH annexes & objectives

REACH Annex	Proposed amendment	Objectives supported
Annex I (General Provisions for Chemical Safety Assessment)	Clarify and further specify the existing Chemical Safety Assessment (CSA) requirements to ensure the assessment of endocrine disrupting properties, persistence, mobility, drinking water resource contamination, groundwater transport, transformation products, cumulative emissions, wastewater emissions, data on failure to fulfil Groundwater Directive and EQSD, impacts on water reuse and the circular economy. Require use of Mixture Assessment Factors (MAFs) for combined exposure where appropriate. Explicitly require consideration of impacts on drinking water abstraction areas in accordance with the Water Framework Directive, article 7(3).	1, 2, 7, 8
Annexes VI–X (Registration Information Requirements)	Introduce mandatory information requirements for endocrine disrupting properties, PMT/vPvM assessment, including degradation simulation studies, mobility (Koc) testing, identification of persistent and mobile transformation products, analytical methods for highly mobile substances, monitoring data where available, and exposure scenarios covering the entire life cycle. Reduce opportunities to waive these studies where PMT/vPvM concern exists.	1, 2, 3
Annex XI (Adaptation of Standard Testing Regime)	Restrict waiving of persistence and mobility testing. Strengthen criteria for read-across involving persistent substances and require robust scientific justification where PMT/vPvM properties cannot be excluded.	1, 2, 3
Annex XIII (Criteria for PBT/vPvB)	Annex XIII to be amended to include criteria for the identification of PMT and vPvM substances. These criteria shall be identical to the criteria for the hazard classes 'persistent, mobile and toxic' and 'very persistent and very mobile' laid down in Part 4 of Annex I to the CLP Regulation ((EC) No 1272/2008. Define persistence, mobility, toxicity, assessment methods, weight-of-	3

REACH Annex	Proposed amendment	Objectives supported
	evidence and treatment of transformation products. Establish that meeting these criteria provides a basis for demonstrating an equivalent level of concern under Article 57(f), allowing PMT/vPvM substances to be identified as SVHCs on a case-by-case basis through the Article 59 procedure.	
Annex XV (Preparation of SVHC and Restriction Dossiers)	Prioritise and facilitate accelerated use of the existing fast-track procedure under Article 68(2) for CMR substances in consumer mixtures and articles, and develop standardised assessment approaches, building on the existing criteria in Annex XIII REACH and Annex I to the CLP Regulation, to shorten the practical assessment timeline for the identification of PBT/vPvB, PMT/vPvM and endocrine-disrupting substances. Any derogations from restrictions should be time-limited to drive substitution.	4, 5, 6
Annex XVI (Socio-economic Analysis)	Require inclusion of external costs associated with drinking water treatment, wastewater treatment, environmental remediation, ecosystem damage, loss of circularity and impacts on critical water infrastructure. Ensure long-term contamination costs are fully reflected in socio-economic analyses for all uses. Include these costs in the analysis of the costs and benefits of phasing out a specific use instead of summarising them at the end of the restriction dossier.	1, 2, 4
Annex XVII (Restrictions)	Prioritise and facilitate accelerated use of the existing fast-track procedure under Article 68(2) for CMR substances in consumer mixtures and articles, and develop standardised assessment approaches, building on the existing criteria in Annex XIII (REACH) and Annex I (CLP Regulation), to shorten the practical assessment timeline for the identification of PBT/vPvB, PMT/vPvM and endocrine-disrupting substances. Ensure that substitution and phase-out options are systematically assessed and, where appropriate, included in individual restriction proposals, within the existing framework of this Regulation.	4, 5, 6

Additional considerations

In addition to the proposed amendments, and to improve the protection of European water resources for today and future generations, EurEau recommends the following structural and institutional improvements, beyond REACH:

- Strengthen ECHA's resources.
- Strengthen enforcement across the EU and improve compliance capacities.
- Provide ECHA with a strong and operational mandate whenever emerging risks are identified, enabling rapid scientific assessment and regulatory follow-up.

4. Conclusion

REACH has a key role to play in protecting our water resources and ensure resilient and affordable water services for people and the economy. The revision of the REACH Annexes offers an opportunity to overcome many of the weaknesses of the current framework.

About EurEau

EurEau represents Europe's water sector, bringing together 70,000 public and private drinking water and wastewater service providers across 33 countries.

We work with EU institutions and international organisations to ensure legislation supports resilient, sustainable and affordable water services by protecting water quality, promoting resource efficiency and safeguarding access to water.

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